THE PATH TO HAPPINESS IN "THE MARRIAGE GAME"

Coming aboard the yacht.

Verbal Points in a Play in Which Indifferently Married People Are Given Words of Wisdom From Pretty Lips —Also Words of Foolishness From Unpretty Lips

"HOW to be happy though married" should be the title of Anne Crawford Flexner's play. Instead of that she calls it "The Marriage Game." However, by any title it would be amusing and with Alexandra Carlisle in the leading role it would be well worth seeing. It all happens aboard a yacht. It is Ingraham's yacht, and it is anchored in the East River and then moves up the Sound to New London. His sister Racie is angry because her husband of two years standing went off on a fishing trip and forgot the wedding anniversary. So Racie's husband, Tom, goes to the club to live and Ingraham gives a yachting party to which he invites both Racie and Tom without letting either know that the other is going. There are two other married couples that he invites the same way with the idea of making them better friends, but unfortunately one of the married men thinks it is a bachelor party and brings along a charming and unchaperoned young woman. For want of a better name she is known as Mrs. Oliver. Of course she is the prettiest and cleverest of all and it is she who shows the married women how to be happy even with husbands to annoy them. This is the part Miss Carlisle plays.

When the curtain goes up it shows the deck of the yacht with stewards busy putting things to rights. The assistant steward says: "Me furst idea was a bachelor cruise. Mr. Ingraham give horders for a hextry supply of cigars and old port with the champagne. That pints ter gentlemen."

Steward—Not pints, quarts.

Ass't—But hall this confectionery, an' new novels, an' flowers! You can take it from me that spells lidies.

Mrs. Frost—When you have done talking nonsense, Charles, you might see where I put the mustard.

Frost—Emily, I hoped you had forgotten the mustard.

Mrs. Frost—I never forget anything. I put it right next the hot water bottle. What would become of you men if there were no women in the world?

Frost—We should be scarce, Emily, but we might be happier.

Ingraham—This isn't a bachelor cruise, as you see, but a little conspiracy, a little brotherly conspiracy against my sister Racie and Tom. You see they've quarrelled.

Mrs. Frost—Oh! I hope not seriously.

Ingraham—I hope not, Mrs. Frost. But a quarrel's seriousness depends not so much on what has happened as on what happens next. All that actually happened in this case was that Tom went off on a fishing trip last week and forgot all about his wedding anniversary, which was careless of Tom but not criminal. As to what happened next I'm by no means clear. Yesterday afternoon I found Racie looking up the divorce laws of the State of New York and crying all over them, and as far as I can judge Tom's present address seems to be his club.

Mrs. Frost—Oh, that's dreadful! When a man's at his club you never know where he is!

Ingraham—In Zurich in the olden times when a quarrelsome couple applied for divorce the Magistrate never listened to them. Before deciding the case he locked them up for three days in the same room. Their food was passed in to them by an attendant, who neither saw nor spoke to them. When they came out at the end of three days neither of them wanted to be divorced.

Mrs. Frost—But you can't lock Tom and Racie up—nor pass in their food.

Ingraham—The food is not the point. A yacht presents less scope for people avoiding each other than a modern New York house with a club attachment.

Mrs. Frost—And your other guests?

Ingraham—Er—just the Packards.

Mrs. Frost—Carrie and Jim Packard! Why, they are as good as divorced already. She plays bridge and he runs about town and they never meet except by accident.

Frost—Carrie lets Jim do as he likes. Don't know where he is half the time. Think of having a wife like that!

Ingraham—You mightn't get on with her as well as with Emily.

Frost—Every man can get on with the woman he hasn't married.

Ingraham—Well, if Emily can't get on with you she's hard to satisfy.

Frost—Emily don't want to be satisfied. Women are perfectly miserable when they haven't got something to worry over, and Emily's the happiest woman I ever saw as long as she can worry over me.

Ingraham—But how about you?

Frost—Oh, I stand it as long as I can, and when the home made remedies come too thick I get off with the boys on a fishing trip. But Emily believes only the worst of fishing trips.

Ingraham—What does she know about fishing trips?

Frost—Nothing whatever. But that makes no difference. What a woman doesn't know about a man she suspects.

Ingraham—You're a philosopher, Charlie.

Frost—No, I'm not. All the ancient wheezes and thoughts on married life are started by old bachelors and maiden ladies. I haven't any theories about married life. But I know this: if you've got a wife everybody else wants it's hard to keep her; if you've got a wife nobody else wants it's hard to lose her.

Mrs. Frost—How came you to invite them on this trip? You told me just now only intimate friends.

Ingraham—An intimate friend asked me to be nice to them.

Frost—Well, I should think it would be easy to be nice to her. What's the husband like?

Ingraham—Bill Oliver is a—a stock broker.

Racie—Why, she said his name was Jim.

Ingraham—Yes—yes, Jim, of course. He's just a stock broker.

Mrs. Packhard—That's odd. She told me he was interested in horses. Breeds racehorses and sells 'em abroad.

Ingraham—That's it. A stock raiser, not a stock broker. Knew it was something about stock.

Frost—Stock broker, eh? Well, he's got a mighty nice wife. I don't know when I've been so drawn to anybody.

Mrs. Frost—I think she must be from Boston originally. She has such a refined face.

Racie—It's not a very happy face.

Mrs. Frost—No, it's not. I'm sure she comes from Boston.

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Racie—Quite nice people do come from Paris. Think of living among those heavenly shops!

Mrs. Oliver—It isn't the shops I love, tho' they're fascinating. It's Paris itself. Paris in April, when the chestnuts are in bloom and the lilacs in the Bois. I can shut my eyes and smell them now, and the golden dust above the Arc de Triomphe as one drives toward it at sunset. And the bridges at night with their long lines of lights and their velvety black shadows with a big yellow moon coming up behind the Beaux Arts. Oh, Paris is always adorable.

Miss Alexandra Carlisle.

A scene in the third act.

Mrs. Frost—New York must seem quite dull in comparison. I wonder you could bear to change.

Mrs. Oliver—On the contrary, I greatly prefer American life.

Mrs. Packhard—What strikes you as the chief difference between the two?

Mrs. Oliver—Oh, on the Continent it's the man for whose benefit society is organized. In America everything revolves about the woman. The attitude of the average Frenchman toward women is—intolerable. Now the American treats woman as his equal.

Mrs. Frost—As his superior, you mean.

Mrs. Oliver—Yes! Any woman who couldn't get along with American men——

Mrs. Frost—Even American men will bear watching. But one does hear dreadful stories of the conduct of European husbands! I don't see how a French wife can ever feel—certain!

Mrs. Oliver—She couldn't if she conducted herself on the American plan.

The Other Women (together)—The American plan! What do you mean?

Mrs. Oliver—Shall I tell you how American wives strike me after a long residence abroad? They strike me as being rather careless!

Mrs. Frost—Careless! When I've never let Charlie get wet feet, not once since we were married!

Mrs. Packhard—Don't be a goose, Emily! Feet aren't the point. Mrs. Oliver means that the American wife doesn't stay on her job.

Racie—What is a wife's job?

Mrs. Oliver—Isn't it to convince her husband that she is the only woman in the world worth his attention?

Mrs. Frost—But a wife can't stoop to a vulgar struggle of that kind! She should stand on her dignity.

Mrs. Oliver—Some do. But it's a lonely elevation.

Mrs. Packhard—A wife had better abandon her dignity than to have her husband abondon her, you mean? Of course it's only in France that such things happen. And how does this wonderful French wife manage to convince the man that she's the only woman worth his attention?

Mrs. Oliver—Mainly by being worth it in every detail and by doing it afresh every day.

Mrs. Packhard—Oh, you mean the conquests of the toilet table. We all know that the French lead in cosmetics and lingerie.

Mrs. Oliver—It's not quite so simple as that, Mrs. Packhard. In addition to being an expert in personal charm the French woman cultivates her mind until she is one of the cleverest talkers and most sympathetic listeners the world can show. This requires time and effort——

Mrs. Packhard—Heavens, yes! How does she ever find time——

Mrs. Frost—For bridge?

Mrs. Packhard—Yes. That reminds me—I've a deck of cards in my suit case—wait till I show you a hand——

Racie—Your model French woman never does anything so stupid as—quarrel with her husband, does she?

Mrs. Oliver—She never does anything so dangerous! If she is really trying to protect her happiness against the influences which menace it a quarrel robs her of her strongest weapon.

Racie—Her strongest weapon?

Mrs. Oliver—Her tenderness.

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Tom—Tell me. You've been married—you are married—what is it that makes the thing so darned—difficult?

Mrs. Oliver—Well, there are a number of things, unfortunately. But there are, on the other hand, one or two things that can make marriage easy and pleasant.

Tom—Mention one or two, won't you?

Mrs. Oliver—Well, one is a surface. I always think one should cultivate a surface in married life—a finish, a gloss—not an enamel, that's too hard, and a varnish is artificial—but a soft polish like one sees on the best furniture—that one should be exceedingly careful not to let anything scratch or mar that surface. In marriage a surface is what the entente cordiale is in the diplomatic service. I'd maintain a constant entente cordiale with my husband—I mean, I do maintain it, and I'd be—I mean I am—as careful not to break it as if I were maintaining a European peace.

Tom—You know, I think that's corking. Why, there's everything in having a surface.

Mrs. Oliver—On the other hand the qualities that go to make marriage a success are all under the surface, like icebergs, four-fifths of which are out of sight.

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Ingraham—My dear Mrs. Oliver, why should we discuss what Packy may have thought?

Mrs. Oliver—Have I come to that, to be taken for the sort of woman who goes to bachelor parties—rowdy, vulgar, champagne drinking affairs?

Ingraham—Packy's an ass. I told him so; but after all——

Mrs. Oliver—You think there's no difference between my coming with him alone and coming with him in a party such as I have described? Mr. Ingraham, I lead my own life; I'm answerable to no one. I don't adhere to the established code of morals, but I have standards of my own. I haven't lost my self-respect. I lead a quiet, exclusive life——

Ingraham—But you—er—do lead it? I wonder, without impertinence or curiosity, I wonder why?

Mrs. Oliver—I can't say that I took it up deliberately or that it's what I should most prefer. Do me the justice to believe that I took the step which shaped my life when I was young, alone and impatient of obstacles. I demanded some share in the beauty and happiness of the world. I thought I couldn't live in sordidness and loneliness, utterly without affection. I claim entire freedom in my way of living; but I do feel that the dignity with which I condition it makes a sort of career for it. Of course the prudes and the moralists will never agree to this; but you (looks at his face a moment, then drops her eyes). No, you are like the rest. You recognize no degrees in a life like mine. Once a woman steps outside the conventional pale she is black—black as the ace of spades. You're all the same, you men; you're all color blind.

Ingraham—You're wrong there, Mrs. Oliver. We're not color blind; some men have quite an eye for color. They know the difference between black and gray, for instance, perfectly. They even admire some shades of pale gray. (Bows kindly to her.) Admire them very much. But they have decreed that white is the wear for their women folk, and white alone. The least spot or stain shows on it. Any one can see at a glance whether it's white or not. You may abuse men for selecting such a troublesome, expensive color when there are so many serviceable, workaday shades that won't spot or show stains. Men have queer notions, perhaps, but they are not color blind. Do, please, understand me. I am not sitting in judgment on you. After a sheltered, comfortable life, in which you hadn't even to think for yourself, you had to choose, somewhere, some time, between hardship and luxury, between fending for yourself and allowing some one else to fend for you. You made your choice.

Mrs. Oliver—And I'm paying for it, Mr. Ingraham. Don't make any mistake about that. One pays for what one gets in this life. I'm not complaining.

Ingraham—No, you wouldn't. I can see that it's a sort of satisfaction to you that you do pay. You believe in quid pro quo.

Mrs. Oliver—It exists, whether you believe in it or not.

Ingraham—A woman of your calibre never goes the easy, greedy, downhill way of the weakling. Whatever you do you do well. You have the expert's instinct for perfection—and that's what makes you so dangerous.

Mrs. Oliver—There are other women in the world, and your sister is behaving as if there weren't.

Ingraham—She's behaving like a spoiled child.

Mrs. Oliver—Say rather like a married woman. They seem to think that once married they have nothing further to gain—or lose.

Ingraham—No wonder they can't compete with a hard working woman like you!

Mrs. Oliver—Well, see how it works out. Mrs. Frost nags her husband and belittles him. I show him a little appreciation and he responds like a lonesome dog! What's Mr. Packhard but a big, vain, affectionate child, anxious to be petted and amused and kept occupied? Mrs. Packhard neglects him for auction; he invites me to spend week ends with him. Your sister sends her husband to Coventry and is amazed that he doesn't want a return ticket.

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Racie—Free to go to Park's with some one else!

Mrs. Oliver—It's the husband who carefully observes domestic anniversaries, however they bore him, who is always "quite free next week."

Mrs. Frost—Come away; can't you see it's part of her game.

Racie—How can you? Mrs. Oliver hasn't any game.

Mrs. Packhard—Oh, hasn't she? Anything that a woman undertakes to do is her game. Some of them don't succeed very well.

Mrs. Oliver—You are quite right. Some of them don't succeed at all. What about yours, the marriage game? You married women undertake to please one man and you don't even do that. I've watched you and I can't understand what you are about. You are in clover, all of you, and don't know it. You aren't in earnest, any of you! You hold no trump hand and you just make it spades!

Mrs. Packhard—Oh, come, Mrs. Oliver, I draw the line there.

Mrs. Oliver—You are too good a bridge player, Mrs. Packhard, not to know that you can't win any game except by playing to win. Look how a man slaves over his business; he doesn't hope to succeed unless he puts his whole heart into it. Why don't any of you work as hard to make marriage a success? Why don't you, once you're in it, feel that you've got to make good? And why don't you, if you fail, feel the same humiliation that a man does at bankruptcy? After all it's your job. And yet most women behave when they marry as though they had finished a job, not begun it! They look on their husbands as cinched and regard any effort to hold them as "most undignified." Imagine a man entering a business feeling it beneath him to make any effort to hold that business!

Mrs. Frost—Oh, but in business the competition is so great!

Mrs. Packhard—And is there no competition in marriage?

Mrs. Oliver—None that a wife need fear, if she plays her game and the other woman's too. There's a story Mrs. Disraeli used to tell with pride—even after she was Lady Beaconsfield. I wonder if you have ever heard it? When Mr. Disraeli, waiting for the election returns at the Carlton Club in 1874, realized that he had beaten Gladstone he walked home alone to tell his wife. Earlier in the evening the returns had been against him and an unfavorable report had reached her. She greeted him with no trace of disappointment or regret and escorted him in to dinner. There at his place was a favorite dish which the doctor had forbidden him to eat, an unusually large bunch of his favorite flowers, choice and rare wines. Other subtle and charming attentions marked the progress of the meal. After a while Disraeli arose, walked over to her and kissed her with the words, "You are more like a mistress than a wife." She thought this the highest compliment she ever received.

Mrs. Frost—I think Mr. Disraeli used most improper language.